

Legislative Testimony January 25, 2007  
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I want to tell you a story about my parents who are native Montanans and have never wanted to live anywhere else, even in the winter.

My father worked for the state highway department for 38 years and started in that job before Lookout Pass was kept open all winter long. He went to war, came back and continued to work for the state until 1980. He had chances for other jobs, but he never took them.

Until this fall, my parents lived in the same house for all but a few of their 54 years of marriage. They didn't want to leave their community, their home, or their neighbors. But in order to continue to live together, they had to leave the home and community they loved.

Because there were limited in-home services in their community, my mom was placed in the local nursing home after my dad developed health problems, including cancer, heart attacks and diabetes, and he was the healthy one. He just didn't have the strength to continue caring for mom. The local assisted living facility would take my dad, but not my mom.

Their community does not offer home-delivered meals five days a week---this service alone would have made a great difference for my dad who, as caregiver for my mom, cooked most of the meals for the past decade. He was willing to do this and much more until his health started to fail and he couldn't keep up with the daily household chores. The community does not have consistent homemaker services, so he couldn't count on this extra help. My parents lived within the city limits of the county seat of a rural county, not the back of beyond.

My parents are now together in an assisted living facility that feels too big and impersonal for folks who have lived most of their lives in a town of 800 people, more or less. They moved to a big city in a more populated county because that's where they could live together. Their wish was to die together in the cherished surroundings of their small community and the affordability of their own home. Now at the ages of 89 and 80, they have to get used to new routines and systems, new doctors, a new pharmacy and much more. They have lost the daily contact with old friends and all that was dear to them. They worry about how long their resources will last.

Eight years ago I moved in order to live closer to them. I have taken countless days off work just in the past year alone to take care of them. I transport them to their doctor appointments, make the emergency trips to the hospitals, visit the assisted living and nursing homes, and all other responsibilities necessary. I am a typical caregiver. I work full-time, struggle to pay the mortgage, and attempt to manage my own life.

I hope that the State of Montana, with a \$1 billion surplus, can see fit to make Montana a good place to grow up and grow old. If not now, then when?